



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

A Gradual Release of Responsibility

Nell K. Duke, Ed.D. • November 2010

Topic: Improving K-3 Reading Comprehension
Practice: Teach Comprehension Strategies

Highlights

- Dr. Nell Duke, IES practice guid panel member, describes the instructional model that involves a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to students.
- Duke describes each phase or stage of the gradual release of responsibility—explicit explanation, modeling, collaborative use, guided practice and independent use—and its importance to student learning.

About the Interviewee

Nell K. Duke, Ed.D., is professor of teacher education and educational psychology and co-director of the Literacy Achievement Research Center at Michigan State University. Dr. Duke's work focuses on early literacy development and instruction, particularly among children living in poverty. She has received several awards for her research, including the National Reading Conference Early Career Achievement Award and the American Educational Research Association Early Career Award. She is co-author of numerous books, including *Reading and Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades*:

Research-Based Practices and Literacy and the Youngest Learner: Best Practices for Educators of Children from Birth to Five.

Full Transcript

My name is Nell Duke. I'm a professor at Michigan State University, professor of teacher education and educational psychology, and I also co-direct a research center here called the Literacy Achievement Research Center.

The gradual release of responsibility is a model that's been around for a long time. It was originally developed by Meg Gallagher and David Pearson. And what this model says is that when we teach something—in this case, comprehension strategies, but it really applies lots of aspects of teaching—when we start out, the teacher has a lot of the responsibility. The teacher is explicitly teaching, and the teacher is modeling the use of that comprehension strategy. So the teacher has a lot of responsibility, and the students don't have a lot at that point. But over time, what we want to have is a release of responsibility so the teacher is doing less and less of the work, and the student is taking more and more of the work, more and more of the ownership of applying that comprehension strategy. So that by the end of the gradual release the student is independently using the strategy and doesn't need support from the teacher at that point. And then the important middle is where the student is applying it, but the teacher is still there giving lots of support, lots of guidance, lots of coaching.

Now, it's not as though kindergarten is when the teacher has full responsibility and sixth grade is when the students are off on their own. We go back and forth through this model many times. So we're releasing responsibility to students and then when we introduce some more complex text, for example, we may have to start back up with the teacher having more responsibility, or if we introduce a new genre, we may need to start back up with the teacher having more responsibility. But all along the way, what we want to do is continually try to move the student toward greater ownership and greater application of the strategy.

In terms of strategy instruction, I notice that less effective teachers will often make a big leap in their strategy instruction. They'll explicitly teach a strategy, and then they send kids off to use it on their own. More effective teachers tend to be much more gradual about the process. They'll explicitly teach a strategy, but then they provide lots of opportunities for kids to try out these strategies with them as coach, with them as the guide on the side. And in fact, studies do show that students who show more growth over the course of a school year are often in classrooms where teachers do more coaching, they're the guide on the side more of the time. Whereas, students who show more typical patterns of growth have teachers who do less of that really important coaching step in their teaching.

A teacher who uses gradual release of responsibility will begin by doing a good explicit explanation of the strategy. For example, the teacher might say, "Good readers make predictions as they read. They think

about what’s going to happen next in the story. If you make predictions when you read, it will help you understand the story better.”

Then the teacher might move on to a modeling phase where the teacher is demonstrating how she herself makes predictions as she is reading a text to the students, so that they can get a window into what’s going on in the mind of a good reader as the good reader reads.

The next step in a gradual release is where the student and the teacher together are going to be applying the strategy. For example, the students and the teacher might work together to come up with two or three predictions about what’s going to happen in the story.

The next phase of the gradual release, the student has become the primary reader. The student is the primary applier of the strategy, but the teacher is there to remind the student to use the strategy, to guide the student as to how they might apply the strategy, when it’s a good idea to apply the strategy, and so on. So the teacher’s still there playing a really important role as the coach or the guide on the side.

And then the last phase of the gradual release in a classroom would be where the teacher has kids off on their own actually reading text independently and applying the strategy. And even there, the teacher may have a bit of a role. For example, some teachers I’ve worked with will make little bookmarks for kids that remind them, “Don’t forget to make a prediction,” and the kids will have those bookmarks as they are reading independently. So even still there is a little reminder at K-3, we do need to be kind of using these mental habits as we read.